**Many Afghan children work hard for low pay; school is just a daydream**



Shukriya, 8, sells toilet paper in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan. Although child labor is illegal in the country, it is pervasive due to a lack of enforcement and the need of many families to have as many members earning income as possible.

By Los Angeles Times,

04.28.14

KABUL, Afghanistan — Thirteen-year-old Sami Rahimi rises at 5 a.m.

Before the sun is even up, Sami is pushing a wheelbarrow through the dark streets. He gathers water from a public well. Then he takes it back to the bakery where he works. His workday is not finished until after dark.

Working six long days a week, Sami earns about $80 a month. It is enough to support his entire family — his father, mother and eight brothers and sisters.

Sami has been working at the bakery since he was 10. His uncle, who owns the bakery, began working at age 8.

“I’m happy I can support my family, but I would rather go to school and be an educated person,” Sami says. He is the only person in his family with a job.

The work bores him. He daydreams of graduating from a university and becoming a teacher or engineer. He wants to be an educated man, not a little boy who sells bread.

**Laws Are Ignored**

Child labor is common in [Afghanistan](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=Afghanistan). By law, children younger than 14 are not allowed to work full time. Children under 18 cannot do dangerous jobs.

But the laws are widely ignored. Employers like to hire children, since they don't have to pay them as much as adults. Also, families need the money the children make, said Sami Hashemi. He is a child-protection expert for UNICEF, an aid group in Afghanistan.

Children as young as 6 work in brick making, carpet weaving, building and farming. Others beg, collect garbage or sell little things on the street.

Many families need their children to work to get enough money for food. “They must focus on today, not on a future for their children,” Hashemi said. He is frustrated that so many children don't go to school.

Nearly 2 million Afghan children between the ages of 6 and 17 work. The number is going up. Aid groups are spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan. Some of that money is being spent on building, which uses many child workers.

A U.S. government says many children are hurt or killed in building jobs. Children are forced to work in extreme cold or heat. They also carry heavy loads and serve as soldiers.

**Paid 10 Cents Per Customer**

On the busy streets of Kabul, skinny kids dart among the cars. They tap at windshields and beg for money. They bother drivers to buy chewing gum, candy, maps, scarves and toilet paper. They also pick through garbage heaps for food.

Taxi drivers pay small boys about 10 cents for each customer they bring.

Abdul Rafi is only 9, but he began working when he was 6.

Abdul is the oldest of three brothers. In Afghanistan, older sons are expected to support their families. Abdul is up every day at 5 a.m. for morning prayers, then rushes to the taxi stands. Most days, he barely earns $3.

“I would rather just go to school,” Abdul says. “But my family needs the money.” His voice is hoarse. It wore out from shouting for taxi customers.

He wants to be a soldier one day — a soldier who can read. He takes off four hours for class on school days. Then he has to go back to work.

**Promise Of Education**

Sami Rahimi's uncle also supported his entire family when he started working at age 8.

“Young boys have always worked in bakeries. That’s our tradition,” Mohammed says.

Mohammed has promised Sami’s father that the boy will be educated. “I don’t want this boy to have my life stuck inside this bakery,” he says.

Sami feels lucky he has a job. But his mind is focused on the future.

“I think always about my lessons,” he says. “I think about my future, which is my education.”

Sami hasn’t been home in 45 days. About once a week, he speaks with his mother on a borrowed cellphone. He misses his family.

By 10 p.m., his work day is over. He will curl up under a blanket on a bread rack. He will fall asleep beside the oven as it slowly cools.

Quiz

1. Why are some children happy to work?

(a) they are able to support their family

(b) they get to learn new things while working

(c) they are able to go to school during lunch hours

(d) they get to earn more than adults for the same work

1. Select the sentence that BEST shows that laws against child labor are widely ignored.

(a) Also, families need the money the children make, said Sami Hashemi.

(b) Sami has been working at the bakery since he was 10.

(c) He is frustrated that so many children don't go to school.

(d) They bother drivers to buy chewing gum, candy, maps, scarve and toilet paper.

1. Read the sentence from the article. What purpose does this serve in the article?

* “He wants to be an educated man, not a little boy who sells bread.”

(a) It shows that children who work don't like to sell bread.

(b) It shows that children who work want to study instead.

(c) It shows that children who work want to study while selling bread.

(d) It shows that children who work like to sell bread to educated people.

1. Select the sentence that shows that child labor has been a common practice in Kabul.

(a) They also carry heavy loads and serve as soldiers.

(b) Children under 18 cannot do dangerous jobs.

(c) \Young boys have always worked in bakeries. That's our tradition," Mohammed says.

(d) Sami feels lucky he has a job. But his mind is focused on the future.